

VZCZCXRO7771
RR RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHCHI #0161/01 2910712
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 170712Z OCT 08
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0869
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0009
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0002
RUEHLS/AMEMBASSY LUSAKA 0001
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0003
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0001
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0944

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000161

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [ECPS](#) [PROP](#) [TSPA](#) [BM](#) [TH](#) [NL](#) [NO](#)
SUBJECT: TV NEWS PROGRAM FOR BURMESE YOUTH LAUNCHED

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Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.

Summary and Comment

¶1. (SBU) The exile media group Democratic Voice of Burma marked the official launch of its news program by and for Burmese youth on October 3 in Chiang Mai. Youth Voice is the result of a collaborative effort between several NGOs and governments, and is a first for Burma, giving youth a chance to deliver news to each other on a variety of topics. Due to the success of the program to date, plans are already being made to expand it.

¶2. (SBU) Comment: Youth Voice is an excellent example of public and private sectors working together to make a difference. Its continued success will ensure that those youthful viewers inside Burma who do have access to it will be better informed about conditions inside Burma and around the region, as well as more aware of the outside world. Youth Voice could potentially also serve as another outlet for us to conduct outreach to youth inside Burma. End Summary and Comment.

What Is It, Who's Watching, and How?

¶3. (U) On October 3, Pol/Econ Chief attended the official launch of DVB's Youth Voices program, which provides youth both inside and outside Burma a chance to deliver news to young people inside Burma. The program is broadcast from the DVB studios in Norway, and shown inside Burma via satellite television. The feature can also be accessed via the worldwide web at <http://www.dvbyouth.com>. A new 10-minute long program airs each week, and is re-run three times after the initial broadcast. Topics covered so far during the segment include democracy, sports, the plight of street children, child labor, and the dangers of melamine. According to DVB's Thailand-based staff, they have received positive feedback on the program from TV viewers inside Burma, and the web site has received several hundred thousand hits.

¶4. (SBU) Youth Voice is the result of collaboration between NGOs with support from the Dutch Government. Its primary architect, the Dutch-based NGO Kids News Network (KNN), has launched similar programs in six other countries, including Indonesia, Afghanistan, Zambia and South Africa. Representatives from KNN traveled from the Netherlands to Chiang Mai to attend the launch

ceremony, as did Peter Keulers, the Political Counselor at the Dutch Embassy in Bangkok.

15. (SBU) The journalists who produce the DVB program received two months of training focused on simplifying complex news topics to make them suitable for children, and interviewing youth. The training was conducted by KNN with assistance from journalists working on similar programs in Indonesia and South Africa. According to DVB staff, children participating in the program often have to wear masks to protect their identity for fear of retribution due to statements they may make on the show.

Expansion in the Works, but What About the Future?

16. (SBU) Due to the program's success to date, DVB staff told us that they plan to double the length of the program to 20 minutes as of January. During their presentations at the launch ceremony, they nonetheless highlighted the strain that satellite TV broadcasts and the Youth Voice program place on their budget. They emphasized that when DVB broadcasts went from shortwave radio only to radio and TV, their budget doubled from one to two million dollars. KNN representatives told us that KNN will fully fund Youth Voice through October 2009, but emphasized that DVB will have to look for alternative funding thereafter.

17. (SBU) Currently, the Netherlands, Norway and Canada are the main donors to DVB, according to Dutch PolCouns Keulers. In his presentation, Keulers singled Pol/Econ Chief out, inviting the U.S. to provide financial support to DVB. (Note: He appeared unaware that the USG already provides half a million dollars annually to DVB. DVB staff and Pol/Econ Chief reminded him of USG support in a pull-aside after the formal program.)

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18. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassies Bangkok and Rangoon.
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